

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----009371 240727Z /10

R 231136Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9356

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 9121

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG IS US TS
SUBJ: BRIEFING FOR HOST GOVERNMENT ON BEGIN VISIT TO
WASHINGTON AND CAIRO CONFERENCE

REF: STATE 303444

1. SUMMARY: THE TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER WAS IN A PETULANT MOOD WHEN I BRIEFED HIM ON BEGIN'S WASHINGTON VISIT. HE BELIEVES WASHINGTON HAS NEGLECTED ITS DIALOGUE WITH NON-CONFRONTATION ARAB LEADERS AND MAY BE UNAWARE OF THE DAMAGE ALREADY WROUGHT IN THE MAGHREB BY RECENT ME EVENTS. WASHINGTON'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME OF THE ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS IS HEAVY AND CRUCIAL AND SADAT MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO FAIL. HIS FAILURE WOULD BRING CATASTROPHE. HE QUESTIONS WHETHER BEGIN HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO PLAY THE ROLE HISTORY HAS FORCED ON HIM. END SUMMARY.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER HABIB CHATTY GAVE ME ABOUT 75 MINUTES LAST EVENING (DEC. 22) AFTER I DELIVERED ORALLY A DETAILED RENDITION OF REFTEL. HE LISTENED VERY CAREFULLY, OFTEN ASKING ME TO REPEAT SECTIONS OF MY PRESENTATION, SO THAT IT COULD BE RECORDED BY HIS AMERICAN DESK OFFICER, PRESENT AS NOTE-TAKER. WHEN I HAD FINISHED HE REMARKED THAT, ON THE WHOLE, IT WAS VERY LITTLE THAT I HAD GIVEN HIM, INDEED HARDLY ANYTHING THAT
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HAD NOT ALREADY APPEARED IN THE PRESS. YET HE FOCUSED OVER AND OVER ON ONE SENTENCE (FIRST IN PARA 6 OF REFTEL) STATING THAT WASHINGTON INTERLOCUTORS OF BEGIN "POINTED OUT WHERE PROBLEMS EXIST AND ENCLURAGED BEGIN TO ANTICIPATE ARAB NEEDS". HE WONDERED WHY THE DEPARTMENT COULD NOT HAVE SUMMARIZED THERE ITS CONCEPTION OF ARAB NEEDS. HE WENT INTO SEMANTICS OVER THE VERB "ANTICIPATE" AND QUESTIONED WHETHER MY USE OF THE FRENCH

COGNATE "ANTICIPER" WAS EXACT ENOUGH. SHOULD I NOT HAVE USED "PREVOIR" OR "VOIR EN AVANT"? THE DESK OFFICER TOLD HIS MINISTER HE THOUGH "ANTICIPER" WAS ADEQUAATE. I THEN TOLD CHATTY THAT, IF I WERE TO USE A CIRCUMLOCUTION, I FELT WASHINGTON HAD SUGGESTED TO BEGIN THAT HE PUT HIMSELF IN THE SHOES OF THE ARABS AND REALIZE THAT THEY FACED CERTAIN INESCAPABLE POLITICAL REALITIES THEMSELVES, REALITIES WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE SATISFIED IN THE COURSE OF REACHING THE HOPED-FOR COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT. THIS CAME CLOSE TO SATISFYING HIM.

3. WHEN I WENT THROUGH THE SUMMARY OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE HE THANKED ME AND DISMISSED IT AS OF NO CONSEQUENCE "SINCE ALL THE IMPORTANT THINGS WERE HAPPENING ELSEWHERE". I SAID I THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE CONFERENCE CONTINUE SO THAT THE "FEELING-OUT" PROCESS THAT IT INVOLVED TOUCHED UPON ALL ASPECTS OF ARAB-ISRAELI DIFFERENCES AND SO THAT PROCEDURES FOR DETAILED TALKS TO FOLLOW COULD BE WORKED OUT. HE DID NOT EXPRESS AGREEMENT.

4. CHATTY THEN SAID THAT WASHINGTON SHOULD BE CARRYING ON A MORE INTENSE DIALOGUE WITH ALL ARABS, NOT ONLY THOSE IN THE CONFRONTATION STATES. EVERYONE IS WONDERING WHAT WASHINGTON IS REALLY THINKING, HE SAID, AND WASHINGTON SHOULD BE SHOWING A GREATER INTEREST IN WHAT ALL RPT ALL ARAB LEADERS ARE THINKING. FOR EXAMPLE, HE ASKED, ARE WE AWARE OF THE IMPACT OF THE POST-JERUSALEM SITUATION ON THE ARABS OF THE MAGHREB;
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ARE WE AWARE HOW BOUMEDIENE HAS TRIED TO USE THE CURRENT SITUATION TO ROUND UP SUPPORT FOR HIS POLICY IN THE WESTERN SAHARA AND SEEMS READY TO RESUME ALGERIAN MEDDLING BEYOND ITS BORDERS; HOW KING HASSAN IS ALSO TRYING TO USE IT? THERE HAS EMERGED ALSO A LIBYAN-ALGERIAN MILITARY PACT. AGAINST WHOM COULD THIS BE DIRECTED? HAVE WE ASSESSED THE IMPACT ON THIS TANGLED MAGHREBIAN SITUATION OF SADAT'S POSSIBLE FAILURE? IS THE UNITED STATES COMPLETELY AWARE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF SADAT'S POSSIBLE FAILURE?

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5. HERE THE FOREIGN MINISTER WAXED ELOQUENT REGARDING THE HEAVY HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY THAT THE U.S. SHOULDERS AT THIS JUNCTURE. THE WORLD CAN COUNT, HE SAID, ON U. S. SYMPATHY FOR THE ISRAELI POSITION, BUT CAN IT BE SURE THAT U. S. REALIZES HOW VERY MUCH IS RIDING ON SADAT'S SUCCESS? HAVE WE CONSIDERED THE CATASTROPHE FOR SADAT, FOR EGYPT, FOR THE WHOLE MIDDLE EAST, THAT WOULD FOLLOW HIS POSSIBLE FAILURE? HE HOPED THE U.S. WAS DETERMINED NOT TO LET SADAT FAIL. NEXT HE WONDERED IF BEGIN WAS GOING TO PROVE EQUAL TO THE TASK THAT CONFRONTED HIM. DOES HE HAVE THE WIT, WISDOM AND PHYSICAL STAMINA NEEDED TO SEE A SETTLEMENT THROUGH? HAS HE CONSIDERED THAT FAILURE TO REACH AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT NOW, WHEN PROSPECTS WERE NEVER BETTER, WILL MEAN DECADES MORE OF WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST? HIS MAIN CRITICISM OF BEGIN NOW, CHATTY SAID, IS THAT HE SEEMS TO BE IN TOO MUCH OF A HURRY. HE FELT LONGER INTERVALS AND MORE AREFUL PREPARATION BETWEEN MEETINGS WOULD BE PREFERABLE. THE ISMAILIA MEETING, FOR INSTANCE, COULD HAVE BEEN STAGED TEN DAYS OR TWO WEEKS LATER, AFTER THE CAIRO CONFERENCE. ALSO, BEGIN'S TRIP TO THE U.S. STRUCK MOST ARABLS AS UNNECESSARY; THEY TENDED TO SEE IT AS A CRASS EFFORT TO GIVE THE U.S. PUBLIC AN ANTIDOTE TO SADAT'S GREAT POPULARITY AND TO MARSHAL UP THE "JEWISH LOBBY", HE STATED.

6. CHATTY THEN TURNED TO THE BEGIN PROPOSALS REGARDING THE
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WEST BANK AND GAZA. REFTTEL, HE SAID, HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE U.S. HAD NOT BEEN SATISFIED WITH BEGIN'S IDEAS, HOWEVER ADVANCED THEY WERE FOR HIM AS LIKUD LEADER, AND HE HOPED THAT U.S. PUBLIC OPINION WOULD NOT BE TAKEN IN BY TALK OF "AUTONOMY" OR "SELF-RULE" SINCE NO ARAB COULD ACCEPT THEM AS THEY STAND. AT THIS POINT HE MENTIONED WHAT I CONSIDER REPRESENTS AN EVOLUTION OVER RECENT MONTHS IN HIS THINKING: HE SAID HE BELIEVED THAT SOME FORM OF "FEDERAL" CONNECTION OF THE WEST BANK WITH JORDAN WOULD NOW PROVE ACCEPTABLE TO MOST ARABLS. (IN EARLIER 1977 CONVERSATIONS HE HAD ALWAYS INSISTED THAT COMPLETE PALESTINIAN INDEPENDENCE SHOULD PRECEDE AN EVENTUAL FEDERAL ASSOCIATION.) THE END OF ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE WEST BANK

REMAINS THE ROCK BOTTOM ESSENTIAL, HE MAINTAINED.
IF BADAT ACCEPTS ANYTHING LESS, IN CHATTY'S OPINION, EVEN HIS
OWN PEOPLE WILL TURN AGAINST HIM.

7. FINALLY, THE FOREIGN MINISTER DEPLORED THE CURRENT PLIGHT
OF YASSIR ARAFAT AND THE MODERATES IN THE PLO. HE SUMMARIZED
HIS RECENT TALKS WITH ARAFAT IN TUNIS, SAYING THAT ARAFAT
CONFERRED TO HIM THAT HE AGREED WITH EVERY POSITION
SADAT HAD TAKEN IN HIS SPEECH TO THE KNESSET (ALTHOUGH
HE FOUND IT HARD TO FORGIVE HIM FOR OMITTING MENTION OF
THE PLO). HIS CHIEF QUARREL WITH SADAT WAS OVER SADAT'S FAILURE
TO GIVE HIM PROPER NOTICE OF HIS JERUSALEM VISIT, TO ALLOW
HIM TIME TO ACCUSTOM HIS COHORTS TO THE IDEA, TO PREPARE
THEM FOR THE CHANGED SITUATION THAT WOULD ENSUE. WHEN I SAID
THAT I GATHERED THERE WAS NO CURRENT DIALOGUE BETWEEN SADAT AND
ARAFAT, CHATTY RETORTED THAT HE KNEW FOR A FACT THAT THERE
IS A DIALOGUE IN PROCESS BETWEEN THEM (LEAVING ME WITH THE
STRONG IMPRESSION THAT TUNIS IS POSSIBLY THE CHANNEL BEING
USED).

8. CHATTY, AS WE PARTED, SAID HE HOPED I WOULD HAVE REASON

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TO SEE HIM AGAIN SOON WITH FURTHER WASHINGTON VIEWS. I INVITED
HIM TO CALL ME IN WHENEVER HE WANTED WASHINGTON TO HAVE HIS
VIEWPOINT, AS IT WAS ALWAYS VALUED SINCERELY.
MULCAHY

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